

# **New report, public tour on tap at Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park in Nevada County**

**Keri Brenner, Grass Valley Union, 4-17-15**

The Nevada County gold mine that sparked the key “Sawyer Decision” suspending hydraulic mining in California is on display this month.

Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park is the subject of a new technical report, five years in the making, as well as the site for a tour Monday that will launch next week’s conference hosted by The Sierra Fund.

The conference, “Reclaiming the Sierra,” will run Monday and Tuesday at Sacramento State University in Sacramento.

The Malakoff Diggins tour, which, like the conference, is open to the public, will be on site at the park at 23579 North Bloomfield Road, off Tyler Foote Crossing Road.

For information on the tour and the conference, see <http://ReclaimingtheSierra.org>.

“Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park preserves and interprets the 1850s-to-1880s hydraulic mining era,” said Elizabeth “Izzy” Martin, CEO of The Sierra Fund. “That was when gold seekers combed the Sierra foothills and washed away whole mountains looking for precious metals, creating the diggings.”

The new 200-page report on Malakoff Diggins, with an eight-page executive summary, is published on The Sierra Fund website, [www.sierrafund.org/publications](http://www.sierrafund.org/publications).

The report, prepared by a collaboration of more than six public, nonprofit and community partners, is being released in conjunction with The Sierra Fund conference and Malakoff Diggins tour to educate the public on physical and chemical hazards, and to offer recommendations on how to manage the mine site going forward.

“We are looking carefully for additional point sources of mercury in the hydraulic mining pit,” said Carrie Monohan, science director of The Sierra Fund. “It is likely that reducing the discharge of sediment from the pit would help reduce mercury discharge from this source.”

In addition to mercury used as part of gold mining operations, the report documents physical hazards such as open air shafts and exposed tunnels.

Besides The Sierra Fund and California State Parks, other partners involved in preparing the report are: Sierra Nevada Conservancy, CSU Chico Geological & Environmental Sciences Department, South Yuba River Conservation League, California Department of Conservation/abandoned mine lands program and Sonoma State University Archeology Department.

“The assessment portion of this report used a variety of methods to learn about the nature of the pit itself, as well as Humbug Creek, into which the ‘diggings’ discharge,” Martin said.

Those include:

— Historical research into mine operations prior to state acquisition, roughly 1850s to 1960s.

- Soil and water testing and sampling by EPA-certified labs.
- Continuous stage and turbidity recording to calculate annual loads.
- Event-based storm sampling for total suspended sediment and mercury.
- Physical surveys of the pit and surrounding area using GIS.

Martin said additional work will be done to go into more detail on ways to reduce mercury and sediment discharge from the Malakoff Diggins pit.

She said the additional studies are being funded, in part, by a grant awarded to The Sierra Fund by the California Department of Water Resources, as well as from funding provided by the California Department of Conservation's abandoned mine lands program.